

Minnesociates –What’s That

By Fred Smith

Finally they found what they were looking for!

The Barton Hunter family of Indianapolis had been summering in Minnesota for a number of years but had not found a cottage for sale that they wanted or could afford. Then in 1964, they learned that Violet and Oscar Johnson wanted to sell their four-cabin fishing camp on Hand Lake, right across from The Island. But the Hunters were not interested in a multi-cabin camp so they recruited five other couples from their church contacts. Minnesociates was born, though its name came a few years later.

There was agreement from the first that each couple could own a cabin and the land it sat on and would have a one-sixth share of the rest of land and community garage. Beyond that, there was not complete agreement as to how the legal affairs of Minnesociates should be arranged. Lawyers were consulted and they strongly warned against such inadequate legal arrangements. But the six founding couples knew and trusted each other and did not feel the need for formal legal niceties. They took what might be called a casual approach to their experiment.

They began with a simple “Statement of Agreements.” There is a common swimming and dock area, washer and dryer, freezer, and all the necessary tools for the upkeep of the property. Only cabins and boats are privately owned. If a cabin were to be sold, Minnesociates has one year to find a buyer. Cabins cannot be rented but can be used by

persons known to one of the members. Cabins can be enlarged if wanted but the location of the other cabins requires a community vote. Utility charges other than phone are apportioned from the number of days each family’s cabin is used. There is a common water system from one well.

Changes have been made over the years. A common gas supply was added. A second floor was added to the garage and serves as a children’s play area on rainy days and provides floor space for extra sleepers. Additional lake front was purchased and friends of Minnesociates bought property on each side. All current owners are second generation representatives of some of the original six families.

Minnesociates take what might be called a quiet approach to Hand Lake. They have only small fishing boats, canoes, kayaks, sail boats. The spirit of the community is captured in decision made this summer regarding the cutting down of trees. It was agreed that if a cabin owner felt a tree was dangerous, it will be removed but the cost will be paid by the Minnesociates. But the larger questions such as thinning out the woods, that decision would be made by the community after consultation with experts.

Last summer, 98 year old Joe Smith, one of the original owners returning for his 46th summer, expressed his evaluation of this experience: “Except for marriage and church, this has been the most satisfying community to which I have belonged.”